

# Hartford Union High School

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The Hartford Union High School is located in Hartford, a small city of 8,500 in Washington County, a mostly rural area about 35 miles northwest of Milwaukee. Its 1,600 students come from a 225-square mile radius that includes Washington and Dodge counties, seven public elementary schools, and ten private schools. The size of the K-8 graduating classes from which the high school population is drawn ranges from eight to 150. Given this diversity of students' prior educational experience, a feeling of community continually needs to be developed within the confines of the high school. Furthermore, a great deal of coordination and cooperation is required among many districts if Hartford Union High School is to serve all of its students effectively.

Although students come from a large number of feeder schools and districts, the vast majority is white and middle class. About 50 are students of color (half of them Hispanic), and about 120 students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Hartford Union is a comprehensive high school that employs about 110 instructional and support staff. It offers many different programs such as gifted education, trade classes, business education, agriculture, family and consumer education, auto technology, and woodworking. Hartford also boasts a successful building construction program in which students build a house every year. The welding program places students into shops within the

community as part of the district's business partnership program. A local business donated equipment to the graphics department and provides two-year work placements for students interested in a career in graphics.

The district initiated a strategic planning process in 1991 that involved parents, community members, school staff, and students in setting the goals and direction for Hartford Union High School. In this plan, the district articulates several belief statements, which provide the foundation for its overall goals and strategies. It will be evident throughout the subsequent description that the district's prevention and health promotion strategies represent the following beliefs in action:

- Education is a shared responsibility of the individual, family, school, and community.
- Everyone can learn.
- Individuals learn in different ways.
- Participation in co-curricular activities enhances the school experience.
- Education extends beyond the classroom.
- Learning is a life-long process.
- Effective education inspires individuals to reach their potential.
- With rights come responsibilities.
- Change in education is necessary to remain competitive in the world.
- Knowledge fosters understanding and appreciation.
- Diversity contributes to the well-being of the individual and society.
- Our school is a unique reflection of our diverse communities.

## **Implementation Strategies**

### *State Leadership and Funding Support*

In the early 1990s when the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) was beginning to develop a more comprehensive approach to health education and prevention programming, some members of the Hartford Union High School staff attended one of the regional workshops offered for local districts around the state. This workshop provided additional support for the concept of building resilient learners, a concept that Hartford staff had already begun implementing.

Hartford UHS has used funds from competitive State AOD Program grants to identify and address K-12 curriculum gaps in health and prevention education; begin a peer mediation program; and provide training opportunities to staff, students, and community members. In 1996, the district received funds to promote greater coordination among prevention and intervention activities across the district, to work with a school/community Hartford Area AODA Task Force, and to refocus Student Assistance Program (SAP) activities and renew facilitator skills. Staff reorganization will help these efforts; beginning with the 1998-99 school year, the AODA coordinator will be responsible for prevention activities and technical work, while the school social worker will take on responsibility for the Student Assistance Program, which focuses on intervention.

### *Regional Support from CESA 6*

Support from Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 6 is a longstanding positive factor in the success of AODA prevention programs at Hartford Union High School. CESA 6 helped organize the K-8 districts in the Hartford area to share resources and funding, bringing in the high school district to provide a comprehensive scope to the work of prevention and intervention. Sharing training, materials, ideas, and strategies provides all K-12 students in these districts with the opportunity for safer passage through their school years.

## **Healthy School Environment**

### *Assisting with Transitions*

Students who come to Hartford Union High School from its 17 feeder schools are not simply transitioning from elementary or middle school to

high school; they are transitioning to a school in which the majority of students come from a much smaller school setting in disparate districts and towns. This situation presents a challenge to developing a sense of “community” within the school. Hartford UHS attempts to meet this challenge by providing a school structure and programs that help students feel at home while encouraging them to excel. In the words of AODA Coordinator Maryjane Burdge, “This can get to be a pretty big place. We want it to have a homey atmosphere.”

The district uses a variety of strategies to help students make this transition. Counselors visit eighth graders at their schools and hold an eighth-grade parent program at the high school to ease the transition for parents and inform them of the high school structure. Eighth graders visit the campus each April, and new ninth graders and their families attend Freshmen Orientation in August. A number of “mixer” activities are held before school begins to acclimate newer students to the high school and future classmates. Once the school year begins, Hartford UHS tries to alleviate stress and build community with a “New Student Luncheon” and activities to help students learn how to make friends. Finally, the message that “not using [AOD] is OK” is reinforced. Finally, a Counseling Department Handbook is distributed to all families, both incoming and ongoing.

When students near the transition point of graduation, families participate in post-high school planning nights sponsored by the Counseling Department. At this time, opportunities for students to become employed or participate in various forms of further education are discussed.

### *Encouraging Appropriate Behaviors*

Character education emphasizing the four values of honesty, integrity, respect, and responsibility has been implemented in the district. Now called “First Class,” the program focuses on instilling these values into every operation of the district, including the way in which staff members do their jobs. The name of the program offers possibilities for brief interventions of inappropriate behavior. For example, if a student is acting out in the hallway, a teacher may say, “That is not a first class act.”

All school district employees, from bus drivers to the district administrator, are schooled in the First Class values. The inclusion of all district employees in this training and implementation

creates community, structure, and consistency for the students. "We have to model the kind of behavior we want for youth," says the AOD coordinator.

The "Striver" program, in which students who are solid citizens are recognized, is a related attempt to foster a healthy school environment. Students who demonstrate good citizenship and the four values of honesty, integrity, respect, and responsibility are honored alongside students with high grades.

A peer mediation program (described in more detail under Student Programs) is another strategy for cultivating a positive environment within the school. One part of this program involves students writing citations for other students who engage in unacceptable behavior, such as swearing or a minor fight in the cafeteria. The cited students then have a choice to go to peer mediation or a Saturday detention. If the behavior is too violent, it is handled with a disorderly conduct citation and out-of-school suspension. The co-curricular code of ethics contains an "honesty clause"; if students turn themselves in for a first offense when disobeying school or community rules, they receive a reduced penalty and are subsequently required to follow recommendations for preventing further misbehavior.

## **Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**

As a union high school district, Hartford coordinates curriculum, instruction, and assessment with the K-12 curriculum committees managing prevention education in each elementary school. The district manages ATOD prevention activities in all grades, with four yearly meetings of ATOD coordinators at each of the feeder schools. In addition to a required ninth-grade health course, the district is in the process of developing a series of grade-level seminars to address the ongoing and increasingly sophisticated issues encountered by young people. Seminar courses are being introduced as part of the district's developmental guidance program; they are intended to systematically address youth risk behavior and to teach critical skills that students will need as they leave high school.

At the ninth-grade level, ATODA, sexual harassment, wellness, and nutrition are addressed in the Freshman Seminar class. This combines physical education and keyboarding skills as well as infuses classroom developmental-counseling ac-

tivities related to peer-refusal skills, career options, and available school resources. Peers 4 Peers, comprising sophomore through senior class students, helps with presentations after receiving training from the Washington County AODA Council. (See the Student Programs section for more detail.)

Such topics as emotional and social health, traffic safety, and conflict resolution are integrated into other curricular areas for grades 10-12. In addition, the recently developed Junior Seminar focuses on conflict resolution, AIDS/HIV, teen sexuality, AODA, stress management, peer pressure, violence, sexual harassment and assault, relationships, and other topics of immediate interest to students. This seminar is also required for graduation and incorporates developmental counseling activities and interaction with resources from the community. A team of teachers, including the AODA coordinator who teaches in the learning disabilities area, is responsible for teaching the Junior Seminar.

AIDS education is also infused into the curriculum using a newly organized peer education program, Operation Prevention. The group involves sophomores, juniors, and seniors in presenting HIV information to their peers in high school classrooms; it is being expanded to area middle school students in a further effort to prevent sexually transmitted diseases.

## **Pupil Services**

The district employs a school social worker, five guidance counselors, and one school psychologist. Emergency nursing services are provided through EMTs on staff who are part of the attendance office. A doctor from Hartford Memorial Hospital serves as an advisor to Hartford Union High School in health-related matters.

The Pupil Services Team is composed of three associate principals, the school social worker, the school psychologist, five school counselors, the at-risk coordinator, and the AODA coordinator. The team meets on a weekly basis as well as in small groups between meetings. Working on a case-management basis, the team links students and their families to services provided within the schools and the community and resolves attendance, academic, behavioral, social, and personal issues. The team helps provide continuity of service to students regardless of the community in which they reside or the elementary school they attended, including information about community services

and programs outside the immediate Hartford area that may be more easily accessible to students. The team also provides staff development opportunities to the district's professional and support staff and publishes an annual Pupil Services Directory that is distributed to all families in the district.

## Student Programs

### *Student Assistance Program*

The Student Assistance Program (SAP) has been actively involved with students for 10 years. Fifty staff members have completed SAP Core Training, and 25 of those have also completed Facilitator Training. Groups meet for as little as one quarter or as long as the entire year, depending on the needs of the group members. Teachers rotate in and out of group facilitation depending on the demands of their teaching schedule, with about 12-15 staff actively involved each year. Counselors, the social worker, and the psychologist are the mainstays of the program because their schedules allow more time to facilitate group activities. Trainings are held yearly; they have shifted to on-site training by experienced staff members and can also include staff from area K-8 districts. Titles of the SAP groups include Concerned Persons (for those affected by someone else's AOD use), Recovery, New Students, Behavior Issues, and Women's Issues (including partner violence). Special groups are formed as students experience specific stresses in their lives (for example, groups for grieving students or for students who have used or abused AOD).

### *Peer Programs*

A variety of peer programs enable students at Hartford Union High School to learn developmentally appropriate prevention information, gain leadership skills, and work collaboratively with others. Specific programs related to health and prevention issues include the following:

**Peer Mediation:** Trained peer mediators are called on to facilitate conflicts among students after a referral is made by the associate principals, teachers, or students. Peer mediators help establish the atmosphere for conflict resolution. Following a structure and using questioning skills, mediators help the disputants "fight fairly" and resolve the conflict on their own without adult supervision. The peer mediators also sponsor

Alcohol Awareness Month in April, with educational announcements and posters throughout the building.

**Peers 4 Peers (also called Peer Listeners):** The Washington County AODA and Hartford Union High School co-sponsor this activity in which trained students in the building assist other students in finding answers to their inquiries. Training, which occurs in the summer, includes leadership activities, active listening, grief issues, and resources for concerns about sexuality, drugs, alcohol, and legal advice.

**America's PRIDE Peer Educators:** These peer educators are part of the Parents Resource Institute for Drug Education (PRIDE) initiative. These students create or use prepared scripts to spread the drug-free message to younger students. Often asked to perform at DARE graduations, these students take a very public stand on the dangers of drug and alcohol use and on the fun associated with drug-free activities.

**Leadership Day:** In 1997, 85 middle school students participated in a leadership day co-sponsored by Hartford Union High School peer groups and 4-H groups from Dodge and Washington counties. Twenty Peer Mediators, five Peers 4 Peers, and 10 PRIDE members were involved in planning and implementation, with funding coming from a competitive State AODA Program Grant.

### *Other Activities*

**Lock-ins:** Lock-ins are overnight programs in which members of the community help to provide alternate activities to drug or alcohol use for students in the ninth and tenth grades. Under adult supervision, students spend the night locked inside the school playing games, eating, dancing, or engaging in other wholesome activities. Some students "camp out" on a hard floor (boys and girls are separated), and breakfast is served in the morning. A Safe Night lock-in during the 1996-97 school year included a PRIDE performance, supper, open gym, and dance.

**Substance Abuse Quilt:** Each elementary school served by Hartford Union High School as well as clubs with a prevention focus at all schools (Just Say No Club, Friends Helping Friends, Peers 4 Peers, Peer Mediators, PRIDE, Operation Prevention, Power of Positive Students) add a square to a traveling quilt about substance abuse. The com-



pleted tapestry becomes a community effort, with student collaboration and creative inspiration. The quilt is first sent from school to school and club to club, with each school and club adding a square of their own design. Once the quilt is stitched together, it is then sent from school to school and club to club for all students to view.

**Leadership Lab:** The Leadership Lab is an all-day workshop focused on communication, friendship, cooperation, and self-esteem. Overall, students are encouraged to develop their own potential and to become effective leaders; to do so, they must be drug-free. The event is jointly funded by an AODA Traffic Safety grant, the district's gifted and talented program, and as part of curriculum and instruction out of the Administrative Team. School staff as well as outside speakers conduct the sessions, while student leaders and school staff conduct follow-up activities. Student leaders from all organizations (such as Student Council, Drama Club, athletic team captains, forensics, and groups related to AODA prevention activities) are invited to attend. Between 50 and 200 students have attended these functions, which occur at least once a semester and are scheduled for after school as well as during school time.

**Schoolwide Prevention Activities:** The district also has schoolwide observances for Red Ribbon Week and Alcohol Awareness Month. Students decorate the school and make announcements to the student body. Safe Night celebrates the end of the third quarter and promotes a violence-free school. The district also helps the K-8 feeder schools with their Safe Nights and provides DARE role models. The school sends groups of high school students to educate younger students on healthy lifestyles, preventing vandalism, and co-curricular activities.

## Adult Programs

### *Staff*

The district works with the Hartford Area Professional Improvement Staff Development Council, an association of administrators and teachers from Hartford Union High School and surrounding K-8 schools, both public and private. The council meets monthly to address curriculum issues, design and implement staff development training for K-12 staff in all areas of education, and assist staff in working with students from a large number of different schools and communities. This

coordination of staff development and communication among schools enhances continuity and reinforcement of AODA, violence, and prevention of other risky behaviors for students in all districts. Staff development is also handled in each separate district as needs arise; overall, this combination of staff development efforts links smaller districts to programs that meet their individual needs. Finally, the district implements a "mentor" program for new staff, giving them the opportunity to work with experienced staff.

An employee assistance program is offered to the staff each year through a contract with an outside agency. An active Wellness Committee has weekly articles in the staff newsletter and sponsors a walk/run on staff development days during the school year. An extensive library of ATOD-related materials is available, and speakers periodically are brought in to update faculty on the latest issues in these areas. ATOD staff development opportunities are also available.

### *Parents*

The district offers a variety of services and programs to acquaint parents with the school and to assist them in their role as parents. They include:

**Parent Support Groups:** Information is shared with parents through the school handbook and the Pupil Services Directory, including assistance available in the wider community. Such assistance includes support groups for ADD/ADHD and Parents for a United Family Front (PUFFS). Parents are encouraged to follow up with community assistance once the resources of Hartford Union High School have been exhausted.

**Families '99, '00, '01, '02:** This network of parents of students in each of the four high school grade levels meets monthly to address the concerns of students at that age. Parents set their own directions, depending on the needs of the class with which they are working. Topics range from school services to peer-refusal skills in the ninth grade, sophomore fun nights, postsecondary options for juniors, and financial aid for seniors. Parents of juniors help sponsor post-prom, an all-night alcohol and drug-free party usually held at a local movie theater following the prom. Parents of seniors solicit donations from the community and help to sponsor Project Graduation, an alcohol and drug-free graduation party. Mixing fun and preparation for life, these parent groups offer

the opportunity for school service and support for parents as they navigate with their teens through the high school years.

**Parent to Parent:** This videotape series explores a new issue each week, which parents and a facilitator then discuss. Sessions usually last about an hour and help parents connect with each other and share ideas for bringing about richer communication with their teenagers. Audiotapes of the series are available for parents to check out in the event of absence or to review a topic. Shorter versions of this training are now available for busy parents who are unable to devote 8-10 weeks to the longer version.

## **Family and Community Connections**

Because its student population comes from 17 different K-8 feeder schools and districts, Hartford Union High School has developed an elaborate and encompassing network to connect the school with families and communities. It regards Family and Community Connections as the most evolved of all CSHP components. For example, all school committees, including the Human Growth and Development Committee, contain students, parents, community members, school board representatives, and staff that represent most populations within the communities. The district's Character Education Task Force has identified character traits upon which the district focuses and conducts activities, such as speakers and posters, to develop and reinforce these traits within the school and community. The intergenerational composition of committee participants makes possible varied perceptions of both problems and solutions.

In addition to the connections described below which are specific to health and prevention issues, the district has a series of business partnerships around apprenticeships, job training, and cooperative work programs. Identified "at-risk" students participate in the School within a School tutoring components, collaborating with community agencies.

### *Hartford Area AODA Task Force*

The Hartford Area Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Task Force was begun in 1996 as an exploratory group that solicited ideas from community members to address the needs of K-12 stu-

dents. The task force grew out of meetings of the AODA coordinators from feeder districts surrounding Hartford Union High School and an expressed need to combine resources rather than divide efforts. The group includes representation from the county department of social services, police force members, Washington County Drug and Alcohol Council, other community agencies, K-8 school representatives, parents, and students. It meets twice annually to consider how to infuse positive influences in the school and community, act as a sounding board for schoolwide projects, and oversee community activities. Students use their leadership skills to implement many of the ideas put forth by the task force.

### *Home Pages for AODA, Peer Mediation, and Hartford Teen Volunteers*

Students have developed and posted pages attached to the Hartford Union High School home page on the world wide web to share information about alcohol and drugs or about specific programs that rely on the strength of students for positive community connections. First begun as a class project, students researched various other sites and local information before posting the pages in 1997.

### *Law Enforcement*

Law enforcement at the local and county levels is very involved in the activities of Hartford Union High School. Each year officials are invited to a staff meeting and a parent meeting to present information on drugs and gang activities. Drug-sniffing dogs are part of the presentation and help to reinforce the school message of zero tolerance. These presentations are frequently scheduled after a schoolwide locker search with the dogs, which heightens community interest.

A Police Liaison Program also exists in the district. Staff members attend monthly meetings with the Sheriff's Department and participate in the semi-annual meetings of the multi-jurisdictional drug unit. Staff members attending these meetings vary depending on the topic and have included the associate principals, school social worker, school psychologist, school counselor, and AODA coordinator.

### *Washington County Alliance*

The district works closely with the Washington County Alliance to prevent duplication of pro-

grams. The alliance consists of school district representatives, county department of social services and law enforcement staff, and the Comprehensive Community Service Agency (CCSA), which coordinates services within the county for children and families. Families and Communities Invested Together (FACIT) is a program begun by the Alliance to address the needs of seriously emotionally disturbed students in a day treatment setting that utilizes the services of St. Amelian's, a residential school in Milwaukee for such students, as well as local teaching staff.

### *Other Connections*

- Presentations about AIDS/HIV have been given to staff, students, and the community. The district works with the local hospital to sponsor speakers on this topic. Other presentations have included such topics as violence prevention with peer mediation, two-way communication, and nonviolent crisis intervention.
- Channel 22, a local-access television station operating at the school, provides opportunities for students to promote prevention through the arts.

- Students are involved in a variety of community service activities, including food, clothing, and blood drives as well as volunteer work. This community service, which reaches new highs each year, exemplifies student and community generosity and helps build student character.

### **Future Directions**

Building the resilience of students in the late 1990s and beyond is the future focus of the Hartford Union High School District. Involvement of students, staff, and the community is central to this positive initiative on the part of the district. A study group exploring equity and diversity issues and Search Institute materials on resiliency and asset building will be used during the 1998-99 school year as the district sets a course for the next century. This course will emphasize building on the strengths of students, encouraging positive character traits, tapping into community resources, and sharing the responsibility of raising young people with all stakeholders.